

CHAPTER 9 – COMMUNITY DESIGN

Introduction

Although Morgan County is relatively small both in population and total acreage, its rich cultural history can be seen in the built-up environments that compose its population centers. Given the potential commercial tourism and recreational value that have driven the construction of more than 15% of its housing stock as seasonal homes and a thriving 42 million dollar annual tourism industry, it is important to preserve the heritage that exists within each community.

This preservation effort should first include an assessment of the more prominent features that make up the unique character of its many communities, and from that assessment provide direction for outlining measures that will support the continued appearance of each as development continues to proceed across the historical County landscape.

Communities

There are several dominant communities outlined within this Plan that make up much of the population base that exists within the County, residing in close proximity to urban centers that have existed since the creation of the County. These include the towns of Bath and Paw Paw, as well as unincorporated areas such as Great Cacapon and Unger.

Small Towns

The most notable community center is the Berkeley Springs area which surrounds the historic Town of Bath and serves as the County seat. This area, which includes a large concentration of the total County population, is easily identified through several distinct community features. These features, which are prevalent in both natural sites and architectural style, draw much of their attention from the tourism-driven industries of the famous natural warm spring spas and baths, historic inns, and small town shopping appeal.

Considering the nature of this area as the cultural hub within the County, residential and commercial growth is projected to continue, especially along the US Rt. 522 corridor both north and south of the town proper. This will require a comprehensive approach to planning by the County and Town governments as well as residents, businesses and supporting agencies. This approach should allow for all parties to play an active role in the protection and promotion of the existing cultural character which makes this community a uniquely defined area.

The second major area within the County that is also defined as a community of distinct social and cultural activity is the Town of Paw Paw. Unlike Bath, the Town of Paw Paw is not heavily surrounded by a larger urban area. This provides the Town a greater sense of place, especially as it relates to the provision of public services and activities, making it less dependent than other areas of the County on the Berkeley Springs area to provide public services. The Town, which straddles WV Rt. 9, is located along the Potomac River at the southwestern edge of the County

on the opposite side of Cacapon Mountain from Bath, and is much more rural in character with proximity to many of the close natural recreational amenities located in the County.

As described throughout the Plan, Paw Paw is promoted by its sense of place through such features as a shared school campus for all grades, community-provided parks, libraries, and local public safety services. Given its close proximity to Allegany County, Maryland to the west, which includes the much larger urban center of Cumberland, the residents and businesses of Paw Paw are more accustomed to seeking opportunity and basic needs from this area to the west versus traveling east across the mountains toward Berkeley Springs.

Unincorporated Areas

Great Cacapon is the largest unincorporated community in Morgan County which includes a surrounding population of more than 1,000 residents and businesses. Great Cacapon takes its name from the Cacapon River which empties into the Potomac River on the town's eastern fringe. It was originally known as the Cacapon Depot on the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad mainline and draws much of its history from its location along the Potomac and Cacapon rivers as well as the railroad system. Its name was changed in 1876 to Great Cacapon to differentiate it from Little Cacapon which was also on the B & O mainline. Located four miles to the west of the Panorama Overlook on Cacapon Mountain, along Cacapon Road, it is sufficiently separated from Berkeley Springs by the Mountain to have established its own identity over time, and provides many of the same services to its residents that are found in the incorporated towns.

Unger is a smaller unincorporated community located in southern Morgan County, and distinguished amongst other communities for retaining an operating post office since one was established in 1853. From 1857 to 1935, it was known as Unger's Store until its name was shortened to Unger. Although the Post Office recently closed, the community established in this area thrives with the potential of new neighboring developments. It is located at the crossroads of Winchester Grade Road (CR 13) and Unger's Store Road (CR 11).

Largent is a unique community located along the Cacapon River. Originally called Hopyard and later Enon, its population increases on weekends and during summer months due to the hundreds of cabins and camps located in the hills around the river. Also, located in Largent is the 120-year-old Enon Primitive Baptist Church where the Cacapon is still used for baptisms.

Significant Features

Not all unique design trends can be found in roughly structured community centers, and in some cases they may exist as a grouping along waterways, single estates of some grandeur, or even publicly owned properties that offer features integral to the character of the community.

Community Themes

The Washington Heritage Trail developed in 1998 includes a tour of the many locations throughout Morgan County which are associated with the rich historical link it shares with

George Washington. This includes at least 15 points of interest within the County, from the Town of Paw Paw to a small park in the Sleepy Creek region. These points of interest serve as significant community focal features for the area in which each are located. Just as much of the growth within the County has occurred along US Rt. 522 and WV Rt. 9, the trail follows closely along these routes accentuating the collective importance each site shares in contributing to the identity of these areas.

As noted in Chapter 10, numerous communities sprouted up along the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal and Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. Both being located along the Potomac River during different periods in time fueled the existence of several historic communities that have established identities lasting well beyond the existence of either economic transportation system. Much of the C & O route parallels the Potomac River across from Morgan County on the Maryland side while the B & O route ran more on the Morgan County side. Since their abandonment recreational opportunities have been created along the Canal and Potomac, which have retained much of the pristine character of this area.

Significant Sites

By far the largest single industrial site in Morgan County, US Silica, which has changed names and ownership over its decades of existence, has had a profound affect on the employment and development of the Berkeley Springs area as a County hub. This property consists of more than 2,800 acres owned by a single entity and utilized for its major mining operations of Oriskany sand. However, as this natural mineral resource is depleted, it is expected that the company may only have approximately 20 years of productivity remaining. Given the location and importance of this industry within Morgan County, future use of this property must be taken into account in order to ensure that whatever reuse may evolve from this transition it is complimentary to the surrounding community.

The Ridge Fish Hatchery is only one of seven in the State, producing both cold and warm water fish including trout and muskies. The Hatchery is owned and operated by the West Virginia Department of Natural Resources, and has been in existence since 1929. It is located about 12 miles south of Berkeley Springs on US Rt. 522, and is fed by the Breakneck Run Springs.

Goals and Objectives

Goals

The ‘identity’ of a community is shaped by its design. The proximity and integration of neighborhoods, shopping, and recreational and cultural activities will determine the extent to which a sense of community evolves. To support the growth of real communities, the following goals are offered:

- Encouraging the formation of pedestrian-friendly rural village centers amid residential development to serve as hubs for community life, reduce the need for auto travel, and keep consumer dollars in the local economy;

- Supporting the enforcement of meaningful building codes to protect the health, safety and welfare of citizens and businesses; and
- Enabling multi-generational community wide activities that involve significant and diverse segments of the population.

Objectives

These objectives will ensure progress in accomplishing the community design goals:

- Discouraging the proliferation of strip mall style commercial centers that create traffic congestion and sprawl;
- Assessing the need for a community fairgrounds/carnival facility to provide an accessible space for community wide activities by local organizations; and
- Encouraging centralized and improved communication with the public about local amenities and activities.